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ABSTRACT

Methods are offered for adapting traditional techniques for teaching more communicative listening and speaking skills in a foreign language. New vocabulary is introduced by using pictures, either prepared or teacher-developed, illustrating the desired lesson. Written statements about the characters, activities, and objects in the pictures are used to elaborate on them. The teacher uses three phases of questioning after each activity to extend the material for maximum comprehension practice: factual questions about introductory picture content; personalization of the material by applying the questions to the students themselves; and comprehension checks. Six types of questions are used repeatedly: who," "what," indicating options, yes/no, paraphrase, and information summary. Some are better suited than others to the different questioning phases. Following introduction of material through pictures and the three phases of questioning, other listening activities are used, each followed by the same three phases of comprehension extension. The activities and extension questions combine to immerse the student in a modified target-language acquisition environment. Nine formats for daily listening practice and 10 speaking formats of graduated difficulty are used. Methods are designed to develop broader-based skills and knowledge, reduce stress, and promote student motivation and participation. (MSE)

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A Sequential Approach to Teaching and Testing the Listening and Speaking Skills

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Overview

With today's emphasis on proficiency-oriented teaching in foreign language classes, many teachers have decided that their texts no longer serve their course objectives well. Many texts still in use are heavily audio-lingual in orientation and afford little opportunity for development of communicative skills in the language class. Even those newer texts which provide some context by saying "Pretend that you are Isabel giving commands to her little brother and tell him that he can't do any of the following things." are only taking a partial step toward proficiency-oriented teaching, since this drill is still a drill. Because these texts were generally developed around units of grammar rather than around personalized activities and topics, the teacher often finds the text activities and vocabulary inadequate for developing fluency for particular situations and topics. Therefore today's teachers are heavily engaged in text adaptation, omitting text exercises and replacing them with communicative activities the teachers have developed to better facilitate their students' skills development. While teachers engage in this adaptation process, however, they frequently have doubts about the best ways to accomplish their purposes, the best ways to introduce new vocabulary, and the appropriate sequencing of listening and speaking activities.

Picture-based Introduction of Material

The listening-based approaches proposed by Krashen, Terrell, Asher and others, lend themselves well to this process of adaptation. The teacher can adhere to their suggested regimen of introduction of vocabulary

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via pictures by collecting simple or complex pictures that illustrate the vocabulary and phrases for the desired lesson in the book and/or by preparing transparencies, posters and handouts that illustrate the vocabulary. In either case written statements about the characters, activities, and objects in the pictures can appear with the pictures. The teacher uses these statements to elaborate on the pictures as they are presented to the class, and the students have the written version as study material. For example, if leisure activities are used as the subject, pictures with statements such as these can be used: John is playing football. Mary is playing tennis. Linda is playing the guitar., etc. At this point a process crucial to this mode of teaching begins: that of utilization of comprehension checks.

Listening during the Three Phases of Questioning

Throughout the recommended sequence, the teacher utilizes three phases of questioning after each activity to extend the material for maximum comprehension practice. Phases one comprises factual questions about the content of the pictures used to introduce the vocabulary. (Who plays baseball? What does Mary play? Does Mary play baseball? Does John play tennis or baseball?) Phase two includes personalization of the material by applying the questions to the students themselves. (Who in the class plays baseball? George, what do you play? Alice, do you play baseball? Luis, do you play baseball or tennis?) As before, the required responses are brief.

Phase three incorporates comprehension checks, and these questions can either follow phase two or be interspersed within it. These are questions the teacher uses to check the students' comprehension of one another's responses. The regular use of such comprehension questions reinforces the students' listening to each other in class and thus extends their listening practice. (Who in the class plays baseball, Dan? Margie, does Alice play baseball? Luis, what does George play? Al, does Rosa play basketball or tennis?) At this point, two additional types of comprehension-check questions can be used for further extension: the paraphrase and the summary (What did Mary say? Which activity is most popular in this class?).

Six Question Types for Checking Listening

As the teacher moves through the three phases with questions for content facts, class facts, and comprehension checks, six types of questions

are used repeatedly: the "who" question, the "what" question (Who plays baseball? What does Mary play?), the option question (does Mary play baseball or tennis?), the yes/no question (Does Mary play football?), the paraphrase (What did John say?), and the information summary (which activity is most popular in this class?). As noted in the examples in the previous section, the last two types are best suited to the comprehension-check phase when the teachers question students about the statements other class members have made.

Nine Formats for Daily Listening Practice

Following the introduction of material via pictures and the utilization of the three phases of listening comprehension extension as described previously, the teacher can move to a variety of other listening activities, each of which can be followed by the same three phases of listening-comprehension extension. The activities and the extension questions themselves all combine to immerse the students in a modified target-language acquisition environment in which they can listen extensively on a known topic to contextualized material. In addition, they are not pressed to early production. Instead comprehension is checked and verified constantly through the use of questions that require one-word answers or short patterned answers from the student. A modified Total Physical Response Activity (Asher, p. 74) fits well at this point. Continuing our example, the teacher says and acts out ten to twelve commands that use the leisure vocabulary while the students watch and listen (Swim. Dance. Play tennis. Play the guitar.). Then he/she repeats the commands and acts them out with the students. Next, no longer modeling, the teacher gives the commands for the students to act out alone, first in the same order as before and then in a new sequence. As the final adaptation, the teacher can ask the students to practice commanding and acting out in pairs or small groups. The class fact and listening comprehension check phases follow appropriately here.

A chart is another excellent base for a listening activity. If we use the following sample chart,

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday, etc.
Joe	baseball	tennis	guitar	television
Al	tennis	piano	reading	dancing
Ana	swimming	cooking	dancing	hiking, etc.

we can employ our three phases. First we ask many content questions about

the persons listed. (Does Joe play tennis on Wednesday? On Thursday does Al play tennis or watch television? What does Ana do on Tuesdays? Who cooks? etc.) We then follow these questions with class-fact and comprehension-check questions. Finally the chart can be used by the students in pairs to repeat the initial questioning phase with each other whenever the teacher feels they are ready to do this, on the same day or another.

True-false statements are another format readily adaptable to this sequence. The teacher can use the above chart again as a basis for true-false listening comprehension statements, or he/she can prepare an original set (We play tennis in the Spanish class. We watch television on weekends., etc.) In addition the teacher can have students write similar true-false statements and use their creations in a comprehension activity. Finally, he/she can once again end the activity with class-fact and comprehension-check questions.

The teacher can use the chart yet another time as the basis for a multiple-choice activity. (On Monday Ana ____. a. cooks, b. swins, or c. reads.) Next the teacher can survey student preferences via a simple multiple-choice activity where students raise their hands to respond. (On Saturdays I a. sleep, b. dance, c. play the piano.) This format, too, can be followed with class-fact and comprehension questions.

Asking students to label what they hear as possible/impossible, probable/improbable, fun/boring, etc., is another format popular in new textbooks that fits well in this sequence. (Pete plays baseball on the moon.) Following the reading aloud of ten or so such statements by the teacher with appropriate responses by the students, the teacher can move to the same class-fact and comprehension-check questions to wrap up the activity.

A scanning activity can also incorporate listening comprehension. Using a short paragraph in the target language on the topic (leisure activities in this case) instead of the chart shown earlier, the teacher asks the students content questions about the passage; and the students scan the passage to find short answers to give to those questions that they comprehend. Class-fact and comprehension-check questions can follow.

Many of the above listening comprehension activities are based on the concrete (pictures, charts, etc.), a very desirable characteristic for listening activities. As noted, some of the activities lend themselves to structured speaking practice as well after the listening comprehension portion has been successfully completed. In addition, use of the series of formats that follows will also lead the students to structured speaking practice and then to less-structures speaking practice.

Ten Speaking Formats of Graduated Difficulty

The speaking formats that follow are interactive in nature, lending themselves to student-to-student interaction or to teacher-to-student interaction. The series format is essentially a limited sentence-builder. Students are presented columns of words to use in making statements true for themselves. Column 1 can contain time words (the days of the week, adverbs such as first, later, then, etc.), and column 2 can contain the leisure activity verbs or other material. The students then are to make two or three statements about what they typically do. As an option for the series, the teacher can use the chart shown earlier to have the students make series statements (On Monday Ana swims, and on Tuesday she cooks.) for the other students to respond to as true or false. The series can also be followed with additional personalized questions and comprehension checks of the listeners.

Another variation of the series or sequence calls for the teacher to make a series of statements for the students to put in a logical order (I put my guitar away. I practice for an hour. I find my guitar.) Then the students can be asked to follow suit and create such sequences themselves for others to resequence. This variation, too, can be followed by personalized questions and comprehension checks.

Another variation of the sentence builder can be used in the speaking portion of the sequence. One column is devoted to adverbs/times, another to places, another to companions, and another to leisure-activity-related verbs. The students then use the items to make statements that are true for them (Frequently I dance at parties with my friends.). Comprehension-check questions can be appropriately integrated into this activity.

Interviews are a versatile component in the sequence. Students can be given target-language questions to use to interview their classmates (or a single partner), or they can be given only English cues (Find out what sport your partner plays, what he/she does on Saturday, etc.) if the teacher wishes the speaking task to be more challenging. Interviews should always be followed by student reports as a wrap-up, and the teacher should inject comprehension questions for the students listening to the brief reports.

Situation roleplays are very difficult but very appropriate components of the sequence. They are stated in such a way that two roles are evident (You call your friend to invite him/her to go hiking on Saturday. He/she doesn't like hiking much, but you convince him/her to go. You also agree on a time, meeting place, and items to take along). Students may be

given incomplete target-language versions of the conversation to use as a starter, or they may be given only the English cue-description. After preparation and during performances by students, the teacher injects the ever-important comprehension questions.

Problem-solving activities are probably the most difficult of all the formats if the students are to conduct their problem-solving deliberations completely in the target language. If students are given a topic such as "Students should or should not be allowed to have activities on Thursday nights." to discuss for a brief time, they can then be asked to report their conclusions and reasons, with the teacher again interspersing comprehension questions.

In addition to the interactive speaking sequence, the teacher may wish to inject one or two solo speaking formats. In these activities each student prepares his/her own material to say alone, without his/her performance being dependent on comprehending others. The two formats that follow are generally easier for students than interviews, roleplays, and problem-solving, which are the less-structures speaking formats.

Solo Speaking Formats

Completions are useful for getting students to talk briefly. When given starters such as "On Sunday mornings I _____." or "After school I _____." they can comment on an element of personal experience using a supportive pattern. The starters can be provided on the board, on transparencies, or on handouts; and the students' statements should, as always, be followed by the teacher's comprehension questions.

Students may also be asked to give individual oral presentations about given pictures or topics (How you spend your weekends in December, for example). Students are asked to include a minimum number of words or statements, and after each presentation the teacher asks the other students questions about what the reporter has just said.

The Link to Reading, Writing, Grammar and Testing Speaking

As always, listening scripts can become reading materials, and speaking formats can be used to generate writing. The charts, completions, situations and interview reports all lend themselves well to writing and thus to reinforcement. In addition, the many personalized questions that have

been referred to would make appropriate journal topics for brief writing activities at the beginning of classes or as homework.

While the activities described are by no means grammar-focused, using them can facilitate the students' acquisition of grammatical structures through indirect means as the students hear and use the grammatical forms. Some patterns or forms can be put on the board during activities to serve as templates to assist the students as they listen and speak. However, these activities are not intended to focus on grammar, but rather on communication.

All the preceding speaking activities lend themselves well to use as speaking tests. The very same charts, pictures, interview cues, situation descriptions for roleplays and sentence starters for completion can be the pool of material for a proficiency-oriented achievement test of speaking that can be administered and scored time-efficiently, even in the normal overpopulated classroom. By eliminating him or herself from an active role in the oral testing, the teacher can hear and grade in an hour approximately twelve pairs of students who perform with each other. The average class of thirty can be tested in about one and one-half classes.

Pairs of students draw the required number of question, roleplays, etc., from the pool and perform for the teacher, who uses a weighted five-to-six criteria rating form to assign a score to each student.

Name: Class:
Date: Score:

	A+	A	B	C	D	F
Communication	40	37	34	31	28	25
Accuracy	20	18	16	14	12	10
Fluency	10	9	8	7	6	5
Vocabulary	20	18	16	14	12	10
Pronunciation	10	9	8	7	6	5

In the testing program of this type established at her institution by the author over six years ago, the scale above is used to rate students on a sample of six utterances each. Inasmuch as all students prepare for the test the complete pool of speaking activities that the class has used, a small sample is more likely to be representative of potential performance on a larger sample.

Predicted Outcomes

Informal observation of students in the program described herein suggests two major trends. First more students may achieve a broader base of skills and knowledge in the target language. By focusing less directly on grammar and more on communication, the author's students perform better

in the language and still have a command of grammar similar to the level of command they had with previous more grammatically oriented programs. The better students use and understand the language fairly well (while still making the expected errors), a skills level they did not typically attain previously.

The more average students also use the language fairly well, but they still can't handle grammatical terminology very well, just as previously. The difference now is that all these students have had the opportunity to participate in a relatively non-stressful sequenced approach to developing their listening and speaking skills, and therefore in their communicative ability and vocabulary acquisition when compared informally to previous students in previous programs are dramatically better.

The second trend relates to student motivation and participation. Even though the teacher may wonder how the numerous personalized questions and comprehension checks can continue to be of interest to students, the author's experience with classes suggests that students are fascinated by nothing so much as by one another. They do listen, remember, and respond in class as the comprehension checks on what one another have said or conducted. The sequence of pictures to extensive listening to structured and less-structured speaking appears to make second language acquisition more manageable for students as well, adding yet another reason why we can predict more postive outcomes and encourage the utilization of the sequence described here.

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